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Reference:

Mogharreban, C., & Bruns, D. (2009). Moving to Inclusive Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms: Lessons from the Field. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *36*(5), 407-414. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Introduction

In Illinois, a school district partnered with the local Special Education Cooperative and wrote a state funded expansion grant. In the grant the preschool classrooms had to accommodate typically developing children and children with special needs. Administrators at the school were notified that the classroom was opening only 2 weeks before school was to start. The questions that were raised in this article are: “How does a program ready itself for the move to successful inclusive classrooms for all children?” and “From whom can programs seek guidance?”. These questions were discussed in a study group that met for one hour two times per month. The study group included two professors, one with a background in early childhood education and the other specializing in early childhood special education, and two preschool teachers, including one with a background in early childhood special education.

The Project

Once the state funded grant was put into place and the classroom opened, the study group formed to answer the questions stated above. The group had several other questions pertaining to what inclusion in preschool would look like and what roles teachers, teacher aides, and other staff would have when working in an inclusive preschool classroom. The preschool teachers approached other staff members and formed the study group. Faculty members worked together as a team and had duties such as note takers, time keeper, and completing follow up tasks. The group made note that it was important they were all working towards a common goal and therefore decided upon some key factors to discuss and report on. The key factors were: collaboration, programmatic decisions, instruction, child outcomes, and resources. These key factors were the basis and guide for discussions, program planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Method

Data from organizations, including Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) was looked at. The group also focused on the reauthorization of IDEA and the least restrictive environment that children should be placed in. The group worked diligently to sort out roles and responsibilities of teachers and teacher aides. They also worked to build rapport with children and to build professional partnerships. The classroom had a morning and afternoon program with children who ranged in age from 3-5 and the maximum enrollment in the class was 20 students. The group met twice a month for one hour each session to discuss these topics and brainstorm ideas and possible solutions.

Results

Collaboration

Roles need to be clear and defined for teachers who are co-teaching and for teacher aides. However the study group decided that responsibilities should be shared and that the teachers need to be flexible. A dialogue journal was put into place for questions, suggestions, and concerns that could be answered by teachers and/or therapist. It was decided that the ideal situation would be a scheduled monthly planning time with all team members.

Programmatic Decisions

Teachers are consulted about child placement. It was decided that support is needed for all staff members involved in the initiative. The study group was the main support for this classroom. It was also decided that administrators must support and collaborate with teachers and teacher aides and that the priority of all parties is the success of the children.

Instruction

It is important to use the universal design for learning to guide instructional planning. Developmentally appropriate practices must be used and a graphic organizer was put into place to guide thinking and understanding of a traditional early childhood class and early childhood special education class. With the help of the graphic organizer teachers can easily see what practices overlap between the two classrooms.

Child Outcomes

Planning time is a key component to success. Portfolios can be used to track progress. Evaluating kindergarten readiness skills such as literacy, numeracy, and social skills are other ways to show growth.

Resources

The most important resources noted when moving to a method of inclusion for early childhood classroom was support, resources, and collaboration.

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The authors sum up their ideas with this statement: “The provision of high quality inclusive pre-k services lies within the combined and shared vision and skills of EC (early childhood) and ECSE (early childhood special education) professionals.” In order to experience success in an inclusive classroom the study group put together the following model: teachers need time to communicate, a team who takes ownership for all stakeholders, a shared vision, clear ideas and roles, and support from administrators.

My Thoughts

As a preschool teacher I feel like the ideas that were brainstormed and discussed in this article are beneficial and will lead the group in the right direction. My classroom became an inclusive preschool classroom this year so this article was insightful for me. I would be interested to see the results after the team implemented some of the strategies. It would be insightful to see what ideas are easy to incorporate and which ideas are not as easy. More schools conducting a similar study would provide insight and give a comparison between school staff in multiple schools. Would there be a dramatic difference between schools whose states have universal preschools versus the schools in states that preschool is a choice.

Connections to Course Ideas/Materials

The article placed emphasis on collaboration between general education and special education teachers, between teacher aides, between administrators, and between professionals (i.e., speech, occupational, and physical therapists). It was agreed upon that collaboration helps create a successful transition into the inclusive classroom. The study group also had to work together as a team and experienced the stages of forming, norming, storming, and performing.